



## The Afterglow of Easter

This column is based on a homily given at St. Francis Church in Bend on May 13, 2018.

The Easter Gospel stories tell us something quite surprising: The Risen Jesus is hard to recognize. No sooner had the stone been rolled away from His tomb but those He called “friends” – men and women who had walked with Him for years – couldn’t say Who He was when He stood right before them. Only with effort could Jesus convince them it was He.

Had He wanted to make an overpowering impression, our Savior could have come back from the dead as the Transfigured One whose “face shone like the sun” and whose “garments became white as light.” Instead, both the countenance and the clothing of the Risen Lord were so ordinary, so like what the Apostles were used to, that the accounts of the Easter appearances make no mention of them whatsoever. We have no reason to think that Jesus looked appreciably different to His friends after His Resurrection than He had before His Passion. They should have recognized Him instantly. But they didn’t.

Mary Magdalene was the first to be affected by this apostolic amnesia. She came to the tomb before darkness had lifted, but there was light enough to see that the stone had been moved away. Stunned, she ran to get Peter and John, who emerged from the empty tomb utterly mystified and left Mary alone at its entrance to grieve the soul-piercing absence of the One Who drove seven devils out of her disordered life. Turning around, she saw a man she took to be the gardener and thought he had carried her

Lord’s body away. Though the man stood close by, sight betrayed her: she didn’t recognize him. But hearing rang true when he said to her, “Mary.” At the sound of her name she felt the knowing gaze of the Master anew. There and then she recognized Him: It was Jesus. She knew Who He was the moment she knew that He knew who she was.

“I have seen the Lord!” Mary told the Apostles. But her testimony failed to shake their disbelief. That evening when Jesus appeared to them, they thought they were seeing a ghost. The Victor over death had to show them His wounds and eat a piece of fish to win their halting recognition.

Even this direct experience of Resurrection did not suffice. A couple weeks later these same eyewitnesses spent a futile night fishing from Peter’s boat in the Sea of Galilee. At the break of dawn, St. John recounts, “Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.” He assured them they would make a catch if they cast their nets on the boat’s right side. They did so and caught more fish than they could haul in. Only then did John’s cry of recognition ring out over the waters: “It is the Lord!”

An unsettling question emerges from these familiar Gospel accounts: If the Apostles had so much trouble recognizing the Risen Jesus Whom they saw and heard and touched, how are you and I supposed to recognize Him Whom we have never laid eyes on?

St. Luke anticipates this objection in his account of two downcast disciples on their way to Emmaus Easter Sunday afternoon. A traveler “drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.” Nonetheless, He proceeded to open the Scriptures for them in a way that set their hearts burning within. Nearing the village, they asked him to stay. “When He was at table with them, He took the

bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. *And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him;* and He vanished out of their sight." Going right back to Jerusalem, the two disciples told the Apostles "how He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread."

And not only to them. According to the Acts of the Apostles the first Christians "held steadfastly . . . to the breaking of the bread." Millennia later we, their co-heirs in faith, follow the path of apostolic recognition in what came to be called the Mass, because in this sacred memorial action *Jesus comes to be recognized for Who He is*—the Risen Christ in our midst Who gives us indestructible life in His Body and Blood.

As our spiritual sight grows accustomed to recognizing the Risen One under the appearances of ordinary bread and wine, the eyes of our heart will look to find Him elsewhere as well. We will come to recognize Him in the hungry and thirsty, the sick and disabled, the lonely and abandoned, the unwelcomed and imprisoned. We will see and love in them what He sees and loves in us.